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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
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T H E S I S
THE DICTION OF THE PROSE ESSAY
from
BACON TO JOHNSON.

Submitted by
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*Approved
E. Channing*

ANALYSIS OF THESIS

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I

INTRODUCTION

Prose was late in developing in England. Before Dryden there were several great writers, but they set no example that others might follow. Few people felt that prose was worthy of much attention. Those who made use of it as a literary tool, were influenced too strongly by their study of Latin to depart even in England from the classic style.

II

DEVELOPMENT

A. A prose writer of the Elizabethan Age is Francis Bacon. His vocabulary is not remarkably old-fashioned. His sentences are largely balanced. In the Essays he gives his idea in a curt, concise way, without a great deal of ornament. His style seems the result of his own clear-cut thinking.

B. Sir Thomas Browne is entirely different in intellect and in aim; consequently his work is different in effect. The vocabulary is no more old-fashioned than Bacon's, even though the subject matter might have excused it. He uses a long, rhythmic sentence. He makes constant reference to Latin writers.

But the most noticeable characteristic of his work is charm.

C. Into the prose work of John Milton was incorporated a new aim, that of a keen desire to persuade others of the truth of his statements. His vocabulary is quaint; his sentence structure, strongly Latinized; his paragraph structure, logical. Figurative language abounds, and at times he rises to glowing eloquence, but on the whole, he is difficult reading for the modern reader.

D. In John Dryden we reach a landmark in the development of prose. His age, his own intellectual qualities, and his purpose fitted him to give to English prose a permanent form. His vocabulary is, of course, slightly obsolete, but his sentence and paragraph structure ^{is} ~~are~~ largely of the form used today. In his work we find few long involved sentences. In order to gain a favorable hearing for his ideas, he used a simple direct style.

E. Following Dryden, is Daniel Defoe. From a wider interest in matters of his day and a desire to appeal to the average Englishman, he wrote in a plain, straightforward way. He is noted for evenness of tone. His vocabulary is often coarse. His

paragraphs are units, and consecutive, though often short. He made the essay a practical form.

F. In Jonathan Swift's work ^{the} step forward is in the line of satire and of allegory. He was a master of analogy and irony. The details of his diction are carefully handled. His style is always clear, even piercing.

G. Joseph Addison is a writer of another stamp. He is more gentle apparently, but satiric under the surface. He uses allegory effectively. All his words are thoughtfully selected; each sentence is carefully put into rhythmic form; and his paragraphs are models of unity. He is the originator of the social essay. Through careful polish, some vigor is lost.

H. Richard Steele is less fine than Addison in style, but more spontaneous. Vocabulary, sentence structure, and form of paragraph show his hasty work. Yet he originated much that Addison perfected.

I. In Samuel Johnson we reach another landmark of English prose. He established the modern sentence form and length, gave the impulse for correct grammar, and for simplicity of expression. His early

work in the Rambler is ponderous and heavily balanced; in his later work, the Lives of the Poets, he is simple of vocabulary and pointed in structure.

III

CONCLUSION

Since Johnson's time the essay has appeared in many forms, but these newer productions are largely adaptations of old models. Macaulay, Lamb, ~~De~~ *De* Quincey remind us of Bacon, Browne, Milton. In the work of the nineteenth century is discernible a Saxon simplicity of vocabulary and a higher organization of the paragraph.

T H E S I S

The Diction of the Prose Essay
from Bacon to Johnson.

INTRODUCTION

In English literature as in all other literatures, prose as a form of expression was long in obtaining any foothold among the worthy productions of eminent men. Common coin of intercourse as it was, in the early days no one seemed to think it worth any consideration, far less any attempts at beautifying. When Roger Ascham in the sixteenth century gave as his opinion that English prose was worthy of scholarly care and culture, he must have obtained little or no response, for poetry still continued to hold the ascendancy, or if a prose form was demanded by the nature of the matter, the Latin language was brought into use. Not until after the Restoration was English prose really able to shake off the shackles of Latin domination and English contempt. When Dryden felt the urgent need of communicating prose matter to a large English audience, he forged for himself a form peculiarly his own, yet so suited

to the genius of the English language that it became a standard for all who succeeded him. So in that age of classicism, English prose finally came into its birthright. True it is that before that time there had been conspicuous, even great writers of prose, but their work was great because of their intrinsic qualities, not because they had found the royal road on which all may travel. They furnished no standard for others, nor did they give any great impetus to prose expression. In the fourteenth century under the name of The Voyages and Travels of Sir John Mandeville, a work long supposed to be Mandeville's own, but recently found to be a compilation of stock travellers' [&] stories, appeared a marvelous book of entertaining description and narration. But no great period of prose followed. Another sporadic outburst was the work of Sir Thomas Malory, but that was largely an adaptation of French models. In the Elizabethan age appeared another so-called prose work, Euphues. After a sudden blaze of glory this form, too, burned itself out, and English prose was yet to be. Totally different from John Lyly's work was that of Sir Philip Sidney in The Countess of Pem-

broke's Arcadia, popular for a time, but with no lasting effect.

This lack of development may be attributed to one cause: people thought English "a convenient vehicle of matter, but hardly susceptible of form."^{1.} In short, no one demanded any refinement; hence no one took the trouble to clear away the faults of natural expression. Added to the debasing influence of the ^{n/}venacular was the senseless attempt of the educated to make an uninflected language do the work of an inflected. From the bondage of such ideas, English prose finally freed itself under Dryden. Under Defoe it gained more point and power; in the hands of Addison and Steele it took on greater ease and charm; and in the age of Johnson became a nearly perfected form. And ~~To~~ the essay more than to any other kind of writing must be granted the distinction of proving English prose to be capable of form.

DEVELOPMENT

FRANCIS BACON

(1561-1626)

Among the predecessors of Dryden who in the essay made themselves conspicuous through individual effort, but who failed to influence to any great ex-

1. Saintsbury^y, G: Specimens of English Prose Style.

tent their successors, the first and perhaps the greatest is Francis Bacon, "the prose laureate of the time of Elizabeth and James."^{1.} The failure of Bacon to ^{im}press his manner of expression upon his successors is plainly due to his remarkable exemplification of the precept, Le style c'est l'homme. A man of exceptionally clear and logical thought processes, he naturally fell into a mode of expression marked by great accuracy, condensation, and profundity - a manner not suited to the average writer; hence not of lasting influence.

As a representative of a glorious age in literature, Bacon is of interest to the modern reader not only for his intellectual qualities, but for his vocabulary, sentence and paragraph structure, and essay form. Although the words used by him in the Essays have a slight tinge of Shakespeare and of the Bible, they hardly seem as much out of the ordinary as do the words of either of these representatives of the Golden Age of literature. As a class, the words are rather elegant than simple, though not at all pretentious. It is surprising, too, that his vocabulary is so little Latinized when his great familiarity

-1. Hazlitt, W.

with the Latin language is considered. In the verb, the - eth form gives to the text a quaintness that is borne out by a chance strange spelling like chuse or an entirely obsolete form like spials for scouts. From his sentences the strongest impression is of remarkable clearness, with little variety in structure since by far the larger part are constructed on the compound plan with strongly marked balance, or ~~antith-~~thesis. In the essay on Studies, every sentence except one is balanced through at least three clauses. This form, of course, permits little variation in the beginning of sentences and little inversion. In the essay on Friendship occurs hardly a simple sentence, but a constant succession of sentences joined by and's and but's. As a result of their form, the sentences are long, though not involved. On two pages of this essay the average length of sentence is seventy-three words, the sentences varying from thirty-one words to two hundred seventy. In the essay on Expense, to be sure, in eleven succeeding sentences the average is thirty-three words, a normal modern length. In paragraph structure the essays furnish little chance for extended study. It is

impossible to say that he violates the principle of unity, but in many cases we find little or no coherence of expression, and emphasis is secured largely through climax. Some essays are merely one paragraph long; others show several paragraphs, each dealing with one phase of the thought. Sometimes a plan for the whole essay is evident; again it seems merely a succession of trenchant sayings, each worthy to be quoted. This apparent laxity in construction is explained by the purpose of Bacon in this work. In this time the word essay meant not a finished, fully developed work, but a succession of thoughts intended merely to rouse more thoughts in the reader's mind.

Striking as Bacon's style is, we find that it creates a strong impression through its balanced form rather than through variety and ornament. Figures of speech do not abound, although comparisons are frequent and metaphors occur now and then. Since the work is intended to appeal to the intellect, emotional qualities are lacking; the "sterner stuff" of thought is his aim. But incisiveness, pungency, "curt severity", have given his work a power that

makes it conspicuous in an age when playing with language was a national habit.

SIR THOMAS BROWNE

(1605-1682)

Of an entirely different stamp is the next essayist we consider, Sir Thomas Browne. The great work of Sir Thomas Browne is the Religio Medici, which sounded like a note from another age than that in which it appeared, an age of bitter contention between church and state. So absolutely unlike in temperament, in learning, in aim, were Browne and Bacon that the works of the two men present the greatest contrast.

In vocabulary Browne cannot be said to be any more old-fashioned than his predecessor, nor can we say that the forty-five years intervening between Bacon's Essays and the Religio Medici brought about any great advance towards modern forms. In Browne's work may still be found the old verb forms in doth, hath, etc; he also uses frequently the emphatic forms do make and did pretend. Another peculiarity is his use, in some places, of the apostrophe in forming the possessive; in others, of the s without the apostrophe; and in still other places of the old

form illustrated in "Philaris his bull." On the whole, Browne's vocabulary makes an entirely different impression from that of his predecessor, for in the Religio Medici he naturally draws upon a set of words that have little in common with those used in the Essays. In interesting conjunction with words of Latin origin or used in Latin idiomatic sense, we find technical words and even colloquial ^{phrases} expressions when they suit the turn of his expression. Some words, such as prescious for foreshadowing, prescript for direction, vitiosity for viciousness, arouse especial interest in the modern reader through their quaintness.

In sentence structure, we find a decided change. Instead of Bacon's so-called short sentences, we find units which though not over-long and always clear even when much branched, are never short and snappy. Browne, of course, shows the influence of the balanced construction, though it never seems formal or labored. Even if his sentences are "more
1. formed" than those of any other writer before Johnson, they have none of the rotundity and pompousness of those of the great lexicographer. Rhythmic, full,

splendid, they certainly are, but they seem a more natural expression than Johnson's, natural as his may have been for him. With this kind of sentence structure we do not find formally developed paragraphs. In each new paragraph the reader is aware that Browne is dealing with another thought, but in his easy-going way we find only the intention of giving utterance to peculiar beliefs with some fulness of explanation and of reason for the beliefs. As a result, we have a fairly long paragraph of a fairly undeveloped sort. For work of his kind, strong coherence of thought is unnecessary; for mechanical coherence the word now is constantly called into use.

But the claim to distinction for Browne must be based upon the finer qualities of style. No man of so profound learning could express himself naturally without constant allusion, and since Latin was the study of preëminence in his day, he makes constant reference to Latin works with occasional quotations. Figures of speech he by no means overworks; yet he is a master of the felicitous phrase, for he "thought^{1.} with his imagination." In his grave, meditative tone we can detect no air of insincerity. Unlike his

1. Herford

contemporary Milton, he is never passionate, though sometimes eloquent. With him, of course, the thoughts are not of so great moment as are Milton's; Browne is fighting no battle.

But after all, that which distinguishes Browne from other writers is a charm of matter indissolubly connected with manner, a charm as impossible to analyze as the flavor of a fruit. No wonder that Charles Lamb turned to his works with great admiration, or that Stopford Brooke speaks of his work as that which has "often kindled weary prose, into fresh productiveness."¹

JOHN MILTON (1608-1674)

Just as there exists between Bacon and Browne a great difference in subject and aim, so in the prose of John Milton we are face to face with a third kind of matter and a third aim in writing. Bacon was merely jotting down in a pithy, proverbial manner, without full development of a line of thought, the ideas he has acquired from a varied experience. Browne seems to have had no object but to ease himself of his thoughts, in a manner pleasing to himself. Milton, however, wrote prose for the purpose

1. Brooke, S: Primer of English Literature.

of convincing others of the truth of his statements; he "aimed his words as did the Ironsides their bullets." In addition we must take into account the bent given to Milton's manner of expression by his unremitting study of the classics. To me his work seems less English in form, less simple in expression than that of the two preceding writers.

The most individual of Milton's traits cannot be called his vocabulary. A few peculiar and interesting words we may note: ill as an adjective; docible for docile; to lesson for to teach; obligement and many other strange forms in - ment; herein, therein, withal; but as a preposition; vacancies for vacations. Some words we use sparingly, he uses commonly; e.g., season as a verb. Another strange impression is obtained by the subjunctive form in peculiar cases. Yet these peculiarities give no idea of the force and vigor of his words. In the Areopagitica, his prose work of greatest value, we have a splendid eloquence due to imagination and impetuosity of thought, that makes his work "stiff with gorgeous embroidery."¹ Even though using his "left hand," Milton constantly shows the influence of his "right" in the highly

1. Macaulay, T. B: Milton.

figurative diction.

But this torrent of words pours out through an unfortunate sentence structure. So saturated was Milton with classic learning that we can recognize little of the genius of the English language in his work. Scarcely any sentences are short; in fact one sentence in the Tractate on Education covers twenty-eight lines, approximately two hundred and fifty words. His theory of sentence structure is fully illustrated in his famous sentence on a contemporary. "Instead of well-sized periods he greets us with a quantity of thumb-ring poesies." Not only are sentences long, but they are involved and inverted as well. So many phrases and clauses are packed away and tacked on that we cannot but feel that for the modern reader his thought is obscured. Indeed, sentence unity is often violated in the ramifications of his thought, for he does indeed seem to leave off "only when he is out of breath."¹ Perspicuity with him was no word to conjure with as in the case of Macaulay. As a result of his imitation of Latin, his sentence structure is largely periodic. This "most Roman of the English authors,"² so often and

1. Pattison, Mark: Milton

2. Shaw, T. B: New History of English Literature.

and so strongly inverts his order that he seems decidedly poetic. Another peculiarity is that thoughts really dependent are sometimes written as complete sentences.

In general style, Milton is perhaps as individual as Bacon or Browne, but he is more difficult to follow and therefore less interesting to the average reader. His involved sentence structure makes his thoughts less easy to comprehend and to carry away in the memory. "The only passages of his prose that have survived are emotional,"^{1.} says Lowell. Yet in his work we delight to recognize a rhythmic quality and a sonorous weightiness which we attribute to his great fondness for organ music.

JOHN DRYDEN (1631-1700)

To John Dryden belongs the honor of elevating prose writing to its proper place in literature, of making prose the honored vehicle for all kinds of expression. Great prose there had been before him, but its greatness was due to individuals who wrote it rather than to a general knowledge of procedure. Where Dryden began to write, there was no commonly

1. Lowell, J.R.: Essay on Milton

accepted prose style; when he finished, modern prose had found its form.

First of all, Dryden had something interesting to him that he wished to make known to the world. He wished to unfold his ideas on literary criticism; he needed to answer accusations he considered false; he was also anxious to win the favor of powerful patrons. Prose was to him a means to an end. Since he found no instrument ready to his hand, he was forced to make one. For this manufacture, or better remodeling, were suited all the characteristics of his age and of his own mind. It was an age when form, accuracy, and precision counted for more than imaginative ability; and the power to work formally, accurately, precisely, was in a marked degree Dryden's: hence to the new prose every condition was singularly favorable.

In vocabulary, Dryden is somewhat obsolete, a fact due, perhaps, to his great familiarity with poetry. To the modern reader, this quaintness of words is rather pleasing than annoying. Perhaps, too, the peculiarity of his words is enhanced by the otherwise modern tone of their setting. Such words as 'ere', 'twas', now considered poetical, seem fre-

quently. Many verb forms are old-fashioned, e.g., chose as past participle, weaved as past tense: instead of the progressive form, we find in the negative, not immediately after the direct form of the verb. As in Elizabethan English, which is used for who, and except as a conjunction. In nouns we find many ending in - ment where now we use - ation. One of the strongest effects is obtained by a word which occurs often, viz., ill for poor. Even though we add to this list a few words out of use, like examen, clenches, well-willer, we perhaps are able to make out only a moderately strong case against the modernness of Dryden's vocabulary.

The point in which Dryden seems more modern and the point in which he accomplished the most for prose was in the sentence form. Instead of the long, involved sentence with Latin constructions, he used a form of reasonable length in which the order of the words was determined by the flow of the thought, so that on the whole, he may be said to be fairly easy and natural. In the Essay of Dramatic Poesy, his first important prose work, we notice some tendency to "joint" on thought after thought, but in later writings this fault was corrected. Not only did he

discard the sentence with many relatives, involved phrases, inversions, and attempts at the oratio obliqua of Milton in favor of a supple, flexible form, but he also rejected the stiffly balanced form of Bacon, for both were contrary to his manner of thought. He preferred the running form. The inordinately long sentence, then, found its doom, but a long sentence he did not hesitate to use when it served his purpose, just as he slipped in a short one when nothing but a short one suited the case. This freedom from any one form and this naturalness of phrasing give the impression of modern prose.

In paragraph structure, we find the principles of unity and coherence particularly noticeable. Often the topic is announced in the opening sentence in a modern way; even if a paragraph is unusually long, it contains but one idea.

With his dominant ^a aim, clearness and precision, Dryden created a literary form that was lucid, but lacking in ornament. To him prose was not worthy of adornment; matter that could not be put in a plain, homely form was suited to poetry. In consequence, we find no impassioned prose; all is calm, clear,

straightforward. Even in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy where the dialogue form is used, he has no recourse to the interrogative or the exclamatory form. We have little impression of the "spoken word." But whatever may be lacking in the work of Dryden, through his labors his successors found English a tool ready for their use.

DANIEL DEFOE (1661-1731)

A more voluminous writer than Dryden and therefore one with a greater opportunity to influence the development of prose was Daniel Defoe. His keen interest in all the political questions of his time made him a conspicuous figure, and to him more than to anyone else belongs the honor of originating the modern newspaper. For this task he was peculiarly fitted by his exactness and vigor together with his graphic power of presenting a subject. Yet the originator of the newspaper was essentially an essay writer. In subject he was less broad than his successor, Swift, hence in appeal more keenly appreciated by his own age than by succeeding ages.

In vocabulary, he shows the wide range demanded by a wide range of subjects; indeed, he can be called

a facile writer. Only a few strange words are to be found in the Essay on Projects and The Shortest Way with Dissenters, such as undertaker in its derivative sense and negoce for trade. Nor do we find foreign words; as he himself says, he had a "natural infirmity of homely, plain writing," and he might have added even coarse at times. It suited his purpose to use colloquial and old-fashioned words, for he was a man of business, not of aesthetic purpose. As would be expected from the rapidity with which he wrote, he does not always exhibit an irreproachable sentence structure, yet he is not unclear: his powerful mind would preclude that fault. His paragraphs are necessarily units and consecutive, because his power of analysis is so great, but they are often surprisingly short.

In Defoe's work in connection with the essay we are always keenly aware of the personality of the man and the object to be effected. Always there is prominent the moral aim and earnest purpose of the Teuton. Sound common sense and shrewdness combined with minute observation of life give his writings a vigor peculiarly his own. Seldom does he indulge in

flightiness, or depart from an even^mness of tone that he feels is suited to the average Englishman of his day. In making words do his bidding and in effecting his purpose, he is a genuine artist, though lacking in ornament. His distinguishing mark is "unpolished realism" with no attempt at eleg^anance of expression. When figures of speech are used, they are, through the plainness of their setting, unusually forcible. While the^s characteristics put him in a class apart from ~~that of~~ the other wits of his age, he is to be distinguished from them in other ways: though ironical like Swift, he is not so personal; though humorous like Steele, he is not so magnanimous; though a social reformer like Addison, he lacks the power of the "polite sneer." His wit is dry and caustic, and his irony so unusual that when the "Shortest Way with Dissenters" appeared, each party thought the other was the butt of his satire.

In Defoe's hands, then, the essay was made eminently practical and didactic, a vehicle for pertinent ideas in trenchant form.

JONATHAN SWIFT (1667-1745)

^{Jonathan}
In Swift's Tale of a Tub and the Battle of the

Books, we have illustrated most of the characteristics that led Addison to call him the "greatest genius of the nation;" that led Swift himself to say in old age of the Tale of a Tub, "What a genius I had when I wrote that book." Although he seems in some ways related to Defoe, he has in all respects "enlarged the boundaries of the empire" far beyond those staked out by his predecessor, though the new ^llands may not be most desirable for general occupation. With him a prominent literary form is the allegory; not the allegory of a spontaneous, unlabored form, but allegory carried to its height by the concentrated power of a brilliant and desperately sincere mind. Though his work in general does not show on the surface "conscious care", it is so precisely thought out that in minuteness ~~and~~ fitness of details, his parallels are unsurpassed in the English language. The power of his prose was the "terror"^{1.} of his own age and the "wonder"^{1.} of aftertimes.

In the mechanics of expression Swift seems almost like a writer of the present day. His vocabulary contains few obsolete, peculiar, or awkward phrases or clauses. In a technical sense it is singularly pure; in meaning, often coarse enough; in other words,

1. Nichol, F.

though he took scrupulous care to keep his work free of barbarous forms, he did not hesitate to use the lowest and filthiest terms when he wished to shock his reader. His sentences, also, have little flavor of the eighteenth century. So varied are they that it is impossible to call them distinctly loose, periodic, or balanced; yet at times he uses a strongly periodic form, finally lightened by a loose ending. His accumulation of parallel after parallel in idea results in effective parallelism in structure, though the form was not overworked. In his writing we still find the which clause standing by itself in a way not sanctioned by the best modern usage. To him, however, is accorded the praise of being the most grammatical writer before Johnson. In paragraph structure he is equally careful.

The qualities that differentiate him from his predecessors are matters of style. First and foremost, he is clear and simple; as far as expression is concerned, the humblest reader may grasp his thought, and that, too, without any great store of previously acquired knowledge. He depends on no adornment, is never fantastic, indulges in no fine writing. Unlike Milton, he

rises to no heights, but manages to maintain a uniform level of tone in spite of his excessive use of satire. Yet he is vigorous and powerful even to the point of being bald and coarse. He is always intense, bitterly sincere, and although unsurpassed in irony, he is never absurd. Of his logic, his wit, his originality there is no end. The sweep of his power is evident in the multitude of analogies that present themselves to him in connection with any one subject, yet none far-fetched, and in the host of ideas he can collect about a common idea, as when he is discussing the Aeolists. All these characteristics so converge in his work that it is no wonder he is called "the prince of satirists"¹.

In the essay form he introduced two new devices, safe in his hands, but not to be copied by less masterful writers, first the device of leaving out whatever he chose, and second that of using whole divisions of digressions. In the Battle of the Books, where he desired to omit certain details, he simply indicated a hiatus or pretended that the manuscript was imperfect. In satirizing religion in the Tale of a Tub he also satirized learning in his digressions.

1. Hinto, W. A Manual of English Prose Literature.

JOSEPH ADDISON (1672-1719)

Of the many writers of Queen Anne's Age, Joseph Addison stands preëminent in the field of the social essay. Though to him cannot be ascribed the honor of originating the form, to him belongs the praise for perfecting it, and this because he treated prose with as much respect as poetry and deliberately aimed at beauty of execution.

In his use of words, this artist was as fastidious as any poet. As a result, his vocabulary is unobtrusive, and not until it is examined with care do we realize that when a fine word is needed, there it has been used; where a commonplace one is suitable, there it is to be found. So careful was he that Tarton says he would stop the press to alter a preposition or a conjunction. Yet in yielding to the desire for elegance, he sometimes sacrificed precision. For the modern lover of literature, there are enough strange words to make him realize that he is not reading the English of his day; just enough queer turns of prepositions and strange uses of familiar words to present a strong contrast^s to the modernness of the work in other lines. In sentence structure^{ture} Addison is

studiously non-periodic, putting ease and limpidity above almost anything else. For the kind of work he aimed to accomplish, "to bring philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and coffee-houses," lightness and brightness were essential. In his ^{work} we find none of the amplitude of expression that marks the work of Browne; instead, much thought has been expended in finding the middle ground of sentence length. His paragraphs, too, have a genuinely modern air. From introduction to conclusion, each paragraph seems in its proper place to carry out a clearly defined plan for the essay. And yet there is infinite variety in the plans. One form of composition he carried to its artistic height, the allegory.

In consequence of his scrupulous care, Addison's works have no great power to move. Ease and harmony have taken the place of splendor and outburst: all is curbed and bitted; nothing runs away. Like Sophia in The Vicar of Wakefield, he vanquishes by gentleness. Strength is not one of his characteristics. And yet with what might seem to be formality is coupled delicate humor or keen satire, so that Addison must be

reckoned among the strong moral forces of the eighteenth century.

On the question of the quality of Addison's humor, critics do not agree: some assert it is delicate, kind, gentle; others that it is malevolent, though gayly so, and kindness is merely affected because it best serves his aim. His humor is always satirical, though he works with a "stiletto" where Swift used a "bludgeon." Though the quality of his work was determined by his artistic sense, he recognized his public and its demands. He never forgot that among his readers were women who had little else to read than long-winded romances from the French, and men whose only interest had been in out of door sports. For such people he must dilute his philosophy and mask his irony. The task he had set himself, "to enliven morality with wit and to temper wit with morality," was no insignificant one, especially in an age so greatly in need of just the lessons that he by his peculiar qualities was able to instill.

RICHARD STEELE

(1675-1729)

Though Richard Steele is Addison's successor in point of time as well as his inferior in artistry, he

is his predecessor in conception of plan and idea, and his superior in appeal to the heart. Without Steele to originate the Tatler and the Spectator, Addison might not have found his bent and might have occupied only an obscure place in our literary history. Steele is the discoverer and pioneer; Addison, the promoter and refining influence.

In the use of words, Steele is of course quite as modern, as easy, as natural, as Addison though not so careful and precise. He wrote so hastily and impetuously that he could not stop for mere grammatical correctness to say nothing of happily chosen expressions and melodious phrasing. In sentences we find enough looseness of construction, but little ambiguity. In the Tatler he deliberately affected the incorrect and the familiar in order to make a broader appeal. In paragraph structure and in plan he is less formal and less varied than Addison.

But the greatest difference between the two men is in the qualities of heart that are reflected in the writings. From his deeper feeling and keener appreciation of the fine things of life, for in spite of his weakness in living he did appreciate the noblest

sentiments, Steele wrote in a more sympathetic, engaging manner. His humor is always kindly, genial, free from any sting, though he lacked the power of "polite ridicule." Even when he wishes his reader to see a thing in a ridiculous light, he is so generous that he does not pose as superior. Perhaps the weakness of his own life gave him a more indulgent view of mankind. He could at times be more powerful than Addison, for he did not hesitate to lash furiously at absolute wrongs, and besides he was not ashamed to feel the pathos of a situation. The most moving places in both the Tatler and the Spectator are Steele's. Addison has always been lauded for his delineation of Sir Roger, but if we look closely we find that the papers with ^{the} kindest tone, the least satirical treatment of the old man's weaknesses are not the work of Addison, but of Steele.

In the hands of Addison and Steele, the essay assumed its modern form in infinite variety in subject and treatment.

SAMUEL JOHNSON (1709-1784)

With Samuel Johnson we reach the writer whose prose is regarded as "most formed." Popularly John-

son's prose is not regarded as epoch making for good, due probably to Macaulay's well known strictures. Yet when all influences are estimated, the fact remains that Johnson was a greater power in the development of prose than has been recognized. This power is due to his correct grammar, his sentence structure, and his clearness of expression.

The opprobrium of the epithet Johnsones^e would be justifiable if Johnson had written only the Rambler, but he wrote also the Lives of the Poets, and both works must be reckoned with. In vocabulary, the Rambler is highly Latinized. Johnson himself is said in later years to have regarded it as sorry stuff, "worse than he thought," but even here the sentence structure is clear and grammatical. The fault in vocabulary is due largely to his great command of the English language, his desire for sonority and weightiness. Possibly he stands for a reaction against the vernacular of the three men who preceded him. In the Lives of the Poets, Saxon words preponderate even more than in the present day. To Johnson's credit be it said that he did not coin words though the "Literary Dictator" might be pardoned for so doing. In the earlier work, Johnson delighted in excessive balance, in har-

mony of sense and sound, is marked antithesis; in the later work are found a shorter balance, curter sentences, greater emphasis - in short, the old style simplified and to modern ears strengthened.

Probably the Rambler has been more severely criticised on account of its great contrast to its acknowledged model the Spectator. Though the range of subjects in one is as great as in the other, in the Rambler the adaptation of style to subject is almost wholly lacking. Johnson must always be grave and decorous, solemn and majestic. Carlyle said he preached continually. At heart he was tender, and in private life showed genuine humor, but he had almost no power to incorporate these qualities in his writings. Life had showed itself such a serious business to him that he could only moralize over distress. Much of his apparent artificiality must have been due to his unfamiliarity with the world of people he was writing for. To us he seems trite and commonplace; his own age he impressed with his soundness of judgment, his sincerity, and his dignity. All ages must acknowledge him independent, free from sycophancy, without a touch of meanness. Yet to-day the Spectator is read

taken down from the bookshelves.

with pleasure; the Rambler is seldom ~~resurrected~~. But though the Lives of the Poets Johnson accomplished much for the biographical essay.

CONCLUSION

With Johnson ends this study of English prose, but among the essayists succeeding him are many who are noticeable for the manner in which they "echo" the pioneers. Bacon finds a slight reflection in the terse, pointed style of Thomas Babington Macaulay, though Johnson too may justly point with pride to his influence over the man who so brilliantly, but so partially analyzed him and his work. Milton's organ tones are heard again in Thomas De Quincey's swelling rhapsodies. Browne in whimsicality more than in manner, perhaps, claims Charles Lamb as his disciple. Dryden can look upon them all as in later years he regarded the rising generation from his chair at Will's, but in subject matter he must feel a peculiar interest in Matthew Arnold. Addison is represented in the flexibility and urbanity of William Makepeace Thackeray. For the two most individual essayists of the nineteenth century, Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin, it

is difficult to find a prototype.

By tracing the development of prose in the essay from Bacon through Johnson, we have shown the complete superstructure on which rests all modern prose. Such a versatile language as ours permits of endless variations, but from the basis established by these men there can be little important ^{vi}denation. The contribution of the nineteenth century is a more careful organization of the paragraph and a restoration to dignity of the Saxon element in our language. In the work of the more careful writers there is discernible a greater attention to rhythm. But these advances are ~~made possible only~~ by the work of the great way-showers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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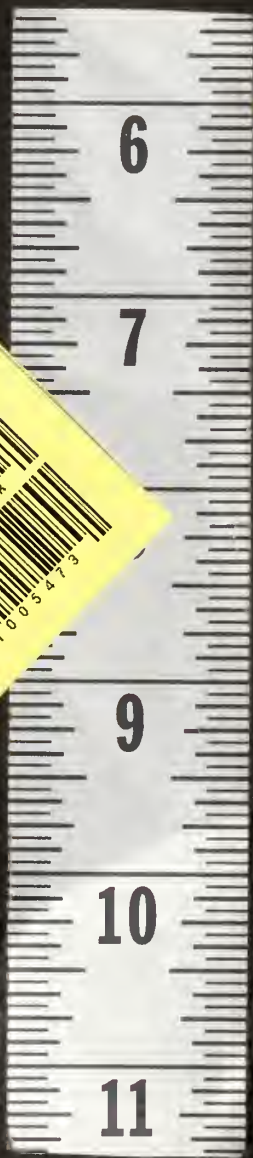
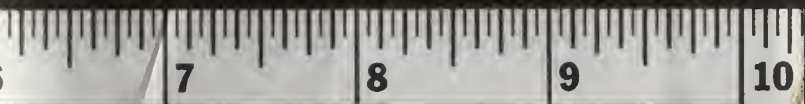
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